



Leroy standout Allie Smith, center, is congratulated by teammates after a big home run for the Lady Bears last season.

Lady Bears reload with talent

BY TOMMY HICKS

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Graduation is always a big celebration for high schools, but you'll understand if Leroy head softball coach Tabitha Baggett is a bit sad when she considers the past two graduation ceremonies at the school. Several of the students wearing caps and gowns at those ceremonies played key roles on her past two teams.

It's time to reshape the roster this season, and Baggett will do so with a few returning starters and a lot of young, talented players who will be counted on to keep the Bears' string of successful seasons moving forward.

"We lost a big group of seniors that really came through for us last year, so while we do have a lot of holes to fill we believe we have a lot of talent coming back, especially at a lot of key spots," Baggett said. "We'll have seniors Allie Smith (2B, all-state selection), Abigail Beech, Megan Warren (OF) and Lauren Anderson here, so that helps."

Calee Tarver was the Bears' top pitcher last season but she has also graduated. Her spot will be filled by a group of young pitchers.

"We lost a couple of senior pitchers, our main pitcher being Calee Tarver, though (eighth-grader this season) Reanna Johnson threw a little bit for us last year and she's one we'll have this year. We've got three eighth-grade pitchers coming to us and one junior pitcher. I'm pretty excited to see what they can do. It's a brand new mix. The past couple of years we've lost most of our team.

"Calee was just phenomenal for us last season. You're not going to replace that with one player. Hopefully with the four that we have we can put them together and get them the innings they need to be successful, and hopefully we'll put the right people behind them defensively to get some ground ball outs and maybe we'll even get some strikeouts along the way."

Other players expected to aid the Leroy cause include Caroline "Bear"

Raley, who started some in the outfield last year, and Campbell Newell, she started a few games as a seventh-grader a year ago. Melissa West, a pitcher is joining the team as a transfer, and first baseman Lauren Dixon also returns.

"Offensively, I hope that we'll do well," Baggett said. "We still have a lot of pop in the lineup but we'll have to have a lot of younger kids to really get in and contribute to the lineup. We don't have a whole lot of upper-classmen, just those four seniors and a couple of juniors and the rest are 10th graders and below. We have a lot of kids who can really play and who can hit. We're just going to be young and we haven't been this young in a long time, but that's OK.

"I think we've got a lot of kids defensively who can play a lot of positions. I'm looking forward to seeing what they can do. We have a lot of very versatile players, whether they are young or not. I think we have the potential to do a lot of good things."